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The situation in Afghanistan

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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/16 and Security Council resolution 2096 (2013), in which the Council requested me to report on developments in Afghanistan every three months.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since my previous report, issued on 5 March 2013 (A/67/778-S/2013/133). It also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events relating to Afghanistan.

II. Relevant developments

A. Political developments

3. The reporting period saw increased political activity among Afghan stakeholders ahead of the country's political and security transitions, which culminate in 2014. Politically, the focus has become fixed on the presidential and provincial council elections in 2014. In building a credible electoral framework for this landmark poll, the appointment of the Chair of the Independent Election Commission will be among the most important decisions. With the term of the incumbent Chair expiring on 17 April, President Hamid Karzai convened a consultative meeting with political, jihadi and civil society representatives and religious leaders, on 9 April, to address this and other election-related issues. A number of groups, including the 23-member Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalitions of Afghanistan, boycotted the gathering and argued that a decision on Commission membership should be made through institutional channels

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once the Law on the Structure and Duties of the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (the "structure law") had been finalized. After the meeting, it was announced that the selection of the Chair would be postponed until both the structure law and the electoral law were passed.

4. The National Assembly continued to debate these two key pieces of legislation. On 13 April, a joint commission of the upper and lower houses resolved an impasse over the structure law, removing a controversial provision for the inclusion of two international members on the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, and sent the law for signature to the President. On 29 April, the bill was returned to the lower house, or Wolesi Jirga. Eight objections were formulated, including arguments that provisions for a permanent Independent Electoral Complaints Commission and an appointment process for the Independent Election Commission, by which the President would choose from a shortlist prepared by the legislature and civil society, were unconstitutional. On 22 May, the electoral law was passed by the Wolesi Jirga, whose members backed the retention of a single, non-transferable voting system and the continuation of a 10-seat quota for the nomadic Kuchi population, to be apportioned among 10 provinces. The bill was then forwarded to the upper house, or Meshrano Jirga.

5. Political parties and personalities continued to explore potential alliances and platforms. Leading figures of the Jamiat-e Islami party have demonstrated increasing autonomy, with some joining the two major opposition blocs (the National Coalition of Afghanistan and the National Front of Afghanistan), both led by Jamiat figures, while others hold government posts. Junbish-e Milli focused on revitalizing and broadening its political base ahead of its planned congress. On 11 April, a representative of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's armed opposition group, Hezb-e Islami, stated that a delegation had met in Kabul with the registered Hezb-e Islami (Afghanistan) political party and discussed potential participation in the 2014 polls. The Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalitions of Afghanistan, despite having a diverse membership that includes both major opposition coalitions, Junbish-e Milli, Hezb-e Islami (Afghanistan) and some government figures, continued to show unity in pressing for timely and credible elections. A new formation, the National Cooperation Council of Afghanistan, involving many of the same members as the Cooperation Council, has also emerged with a more specific focus on agreeing on a platform to contest the polls.

6. Technical preparations for the elections continued and, on 6 April, the Independent Election Commission issued a draft operational plan and indicative budget. The latter put operational costs for the 2014 elections at $129 million. To foster common understanding on funding means and modalities for the elections, which are almost entirely financed by the international community, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) facilitated a series of meetings between the Commission, the Ministry of Finance, international donors and United Nations partners. The goal was to increase on-budget electoral financing while respecting the operational and political independence of the Commission and satisfying donor requirements. Discussions with donors are also under way to revise the United Nations electoral support project, ELECT II (Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow, second phase), and to shift its focus from capacity-building to assistance for the upcoming electoral cycle.

7. On 24 March, the Ministry of the Interior launched the national electronic identification card project (known as "e-taskera") in Kabul Province, which, among a broad range of other functions, is intended to serve as the foundation for voter identification in the medium to long term. The Government has estimated that the initial enrolment process will cost $120 million for an estimated population of 30 million. The Ministry of Finance has allocated approximately $4 million in the current financial year for the roll-out and has requested additional international financial support. UNAMA facilitated discussions involving relevant ministries, the Independent Election Commission and potential donors on appropriate funding modalities. On 18 April, the Ministry of the Interior announced that it would postpone the issuance of cards until the Law on Registration and Population Records had been passed.

8. On 26 May, the Independent Election Commission launched its voter registration top-up exercise, following a one-month delay to strengthen operational planning and ensure greater coordination with the roll-out of the e-taskera project. The top-up exercise involves providing voter registration cards to those newly eligible, those who have lost or damaged cards and those who have moved to a new location or returned to Afghanistan. The exercise, which was first carried out in the 34 provinces, will be expanded to the district level and include a final pre-polling day effort where necessary.

9. The peace process saw few concrete developments. The establishment of an office in Doha for authorized representatives of the Taliban continued to be delayed. On 30 and 31 March, President Karzai visited Qatar at the invitation of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, where bilateral cooperation, including on the proposed office, and investment by Qatar in Afghanistan were discussed. Meanwhile, the High Peace Council of Afghanistan focused on public outreach, including an information-sharing meeting on 16 April with representatives of political parties and civil society, together with UNAMA.

10. In April and May, the Mission organized a second round of provincial workshops on mediation and conflict resolution. Influential community actors in Jalalabad, Kunduz, Gardez and the central region worked to foster a shared understanding of non-violent alternatives, including local, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Separately, UNAMA continued to support the second phase of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, a civil society initiative. In May, over 70 focus group discussions involving more than 1,200 individuals were held. The participants in the discussions — community and religious leaders, women and youth representatives, former armed opposition members and beneficiaries of development projects — indicated that impunity, human rights abuses and corruption were underlying factors fuelling local violence.

11. The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme reported that, as at 22 May, 6,840 former insurgents had joined the Programme, which had 331 community projects and 146 small grants either completed or in progress. A midterm evaluation of the five-year United Nations-supported Programme was released in March. Among the challenges identified were over-centralized structures and issues of oversight, especially in insecure areas. Recommendations focused on consolidating the reintegration process and extending transition assistance for former insurgents from three to six months.

12. On 16 April, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) approved the listing of an individual for manufacturing improvised explosive devices for the Taliban and for constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan. This listing reflected an increased focus by the Committee on those who cause casualties and fund the insurgency.

13. On 26 April, a general cooperation agreement was signed between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia enhancing bilateral ties and, in particular, focusing on facilities and opportunities for investment. On 29 April and 2 May, President Karzai signed bilateral long-term partnership agreements with Finland and Denmark, respectively. Finland will focus on education and on assisting in the training and equipping of Afghan security forces, while Denmark will focus on civil society and police development.

B. Security developments

14. As at 28 May, the United Nations-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan was supporting 140,881 Afghan National Police personnel, against a target strength of 157,000 personnel, of whom 1,929 were women. As at 1 May, the Trust Fund was supporting about 177,000 Afghan National Army personnel (the goal is to support 187,000 personnel) and 6,900 Afghan Air Force personnel (8,000 is the target). On 11 April, the Minister of the Interior signed a 10-year vision document aimed at transforming the police from an auxiliary security force to a service focused on law enforcement. The document recognizes that the function of the police is distinct from that of the military and the central importance of human security to stability and development efforts. Attrition of personnel and coordination between security institutions remained areas of significant challenges. As the responsibility for security continues to be transferred, Afghan forces will increasingly bear the cost of operations and casualties. While lower than in the previous reporting period, the number of insider attacks against international military personnel continued to take a toll. Afghan personnel attacked or facilitated insurgent actions against their own forces in Badghis Province on 21 March, in Ghazni Province on 19 April and in Uruzgan Province on 13 May. The Afghan Local Police programme, a separate local defence initiative with 21,600 personnel as at 23 April, has contributed to increased stability and public confidence in a growing number of areas despite being a particular focus of insurgent attacks. Weaknesses in vetting, command and control and oversight of this force remain issues of concern. On 19 April, 12 Afghan Local Police members were killed by insurgents in Ghazni Province.

15. On 14 May, the group known as the "Kabul friends of Chicago" met in Berlin, on the margins of an international contact group meeting, to consider progress in establishing a funding framework to deliver international pledges to sustain Afghan security forces. Given the donor requirements, including a clear distinction in financing police and military activities, it was proposed to maintain four separate funding streams (one through the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan for the police and three — one through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), one through non-NATO bilateral partners and one through the United States of America — for the army) and to create a new oversight and coordination body that would be chaired jointly by Afghanistan and donors to ensure coherence.

16. The United Nations continued to monitor security-related events relevant to the work, mobility and safety of civilian actors, in particular those incidents that affect the implementation of United Nations activities. From 16 February to 15 May, 4,267 incidents were recorded, representing a 10 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2012, with over 70 per cent of events recorded in the southern, south-eastern and eastern parts of the country. An 18 per cent year-on-year increase in incidents was recorded in the eastern region, with a reported influx of insurgents into Nuristan and Badakhshan Provinces, indicating a shift in the strategic focus in the conflict. Armed clashes and improvised explosive devices continued to constitute the majority of attacks. Some devices found in the southern, eastern and central areas were more sophisticated than similar devices found previously. Industrial-grade material holds the potential for greater mass casualty events, and its volume and steady appearance pointed to the existence of stable transnational supply chains.

17. Armed clashes in March and April in Wardoj district, Badakhshan Province, where Afghanistan took the security lead in September 2012, underlined challenges faced by the security forces and the complex and evolving nature of the security situation. Owing to its proximity to strategic drug trafficking and insurgent routes, the area has become a locus of criminal and insurgent activity. Following an ambush on 2 March in which 17 Afghan National Army personnel were killed, the National Security Council ordered Afghan forces to secure the area. On 27 March, after initial challenges relating to coordination and strong resistance from anti-Government elements, advisory elements of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) returned to Badakhshan Province to support Afghan forces. While some extremist foreign elements linked to Al-Qaida appear to have been involved, the fighters were largely drawn from the local Tajik population, in contrast to the predominantly Pashtun ranks of the Taliban. The extent to which the violence is a result of local rivalries and alliances of convenience rather than a manifestation of a deeper radicalization and support for insurgent aims, is unclear. Sporadic clashes continue.

18. In central Wardak Province, United States special operations forces left Nirkh and Chak districts on 30 March and 14 April, respectively, in line with an Afghan National Security Council decision taken in February demanding their early withdrawal following allegations of abuse by international forces and their Afghan affiliates. Wardak Province has served as the location of a pilot for several local security initiatives since 2006, and has witnessed a proliferation of official and unofficial armed groups. On 16 March, several hundred people marched on the National Assembly in Kabul to support early withdrawal following demonstrations in the provincial capital. A number of Afghan security officials have, however, expressed concern about the potential impact on security in this strategic province bordering Kabul. To date, no major deterioration in security has been noted in Wardak Province.

19. On 27 April, the Taliban announced its spring offensive, named "Khalid ibn al-Walid", and stated its intention to direct complex suicide and insider attacks against "the bases of foreign invaders, their diplomatic centres and military airbases". In reality, international military forces constituted around 4 per cent of targets between mid-February and mid-May. Major incidents included a blast on 9 March near the Ministry of Defence in Kabul, which killed nine civilians. On 26 March, suicide attackers targeted the police headquarters in Jalalabad, killing

five police personnel. A complex assault on the judicial institutions of Farah Province on 3 April resulted in dozens of predominantly civilian casualties. On 29 May, a suicide attack in Panjshir Province targeted the Governor's office — a rare strike in the heartland of the former Northern Alliance. Hezb-e Islami (Gulbuddin) claimed responsibility for the 16 May suicide blast in Kabul that killed nine Afghan civilians, two ISAF personnel and four contractors. On 11 June, a suicide attack on the Supreme Court, timed and located in a public place where government employees were finishing work for the day, killed at least 17 civilians and wounded some 40 others. Successful interdiction efforts included the discovery by the Afghan security forces of a major arms cache and five arrests in Kabul on 13 March.

20. The United Nations, its implementing partners and other humanitarian entities faced a variety of threats. On 15 April, small arms fire struck a United Nations helicopter flying over Ghazni Province. Although the incident did not result in casualties, further air safety measures have been adopted. On 24 May, the Taliban claimed responsibility for a complex assault on a compound of the International Organization for Migration in central Kabul. In its statement, the Taliban wrongly alleged that the compound was a site for foreign military intelligence personnel. Three civilians were killed and 23 injured; one police officer was killed and another five wounded; and four United Nations staff and four security personnel were injured. Afghan security forces demonstrated competence and bravery in fending off the assault. On 29 May, premises of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Jalalabad were subjected to a suicide attack; one civilian was killed and two were injured.

C. Regional cooperation

21. Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan increased. On 25 March, shelling reportedly from Pakistan landed in Dangam district in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. While no casualties were reported, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan expressed grave concern to the Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan. The Government of Pakistan dismissed the Afghan claims that artillery shells had been fired by the Pakistani army. On 1 April, the Government of Afghanistan again expressed concern over what it said were Islamabad's unilateral checkpoint construction activities in Goshta district, Nangarhar Province. This and other disputes led to a number of armed clashes, with ensuing casualties, followed by public protests in various parts of Afghanistan. On 15 April, Pakistan declared that the dispute over the construction of a checkpoint at the Torkham crossing had been resolved between senior Afghan and Pakistani military commanders.

22. On 24 April, President Karzai, Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan General Ashfaq Kayani and United States Secretary of State John Kerry addressed tensions in relations at a trilateral meeting in Brussels. On 12 May, following elections in Pakistan, the leader of the majority party in the National Assembly, Mian Nawaz Sharif, stated that his country needed to improve ties with Afghanistan and confirmed the readiness of Pakistan to cooperate with Afghanistan in counter-terrorism efforts. In a message of congratulations, President Karzai expressed the hope that the bilateral relationship would strengthen further and, in particular, that there would be serious cooperation from Pakistan in the fight against terrorism.

23. Throughout the wider region, discussions are increasingly being held on the challenges to and opportunities for stability presented by the transition in Afghanistan and on the mutual benefits of cooperation. On 20 March, in Ashgabat, the Presidents of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan signed a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of railroads linking the three countries. On 29 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan attended the eleventh ministerial meeting of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, held in Dushanbe, at which he endorsed the concept of the Dialogue in enhancing regional connectivity to promote trade, investment, transit and people-to-people contacts. At a trilateral meeting held in Beijing on 3 April, the Russian Federation, China and Pakistan agreed to make concerted efforts to safeguard peace, stability and security in Afghanistan and the region, support the Afghan-led reconciliation process and strengthen cooperation against terrorism and for drug control within the framework of the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization too was expected to play a greater role in support of Afghanistan. From 19 to 23 May, the Premier of the State Council of China made State visits to India and Pakistan. Joint statements were made recognizing the importance of Afghanistan for regional stability and to back an Afghan-led reconciliation process. From 20 to 22 May, President Karzai visited India, where he paid tribute to Indian development assistance, in particular in the field of education. On 21 and 22 May, my Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš, visited Tehran, where he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and other officials. He was assured of the continued support of the Islamic Republic of Iran for Afghanistan throughout the transition.

24. On 26 April, in Almaty, participants in the third ministerial conference on the Istanbul Process adopted implementation plans for the six priority confidence-building measures endorsed in June 2012. In the declaration adopted at the conference, participants stressed the political nature of the process but also emphasized the need for demonstrable progress in agreed activities and called for interim, ad hoc funding by participants.

III. Human rights

25. Between 1 February and 30 April, UNAMA documented 533 civilian deaths and 882 civilian injuries, a 25 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2012. Civilian deaths increased by 44 per cent and civilian injuries by 16 per cent. Anti-Government elements were responsible for 73 per cent of the civilians killed and wounded in this period and pro-Government forces for 12 per cent. Insurgent use of improvised explosive devices, complex attacks and suicide bombs accounted for 51 per cent of all civilian casualties. Ground engagements attributed to all parties resulted in 83 civilian deaths and 224 injuries, an increase of 35 per cent from 2012. Ground engagements accounted for 21 per cent of all civilian casualties.

26. The country task force on monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict led by the United Nations received and verified a total of 129 incidents resulting in 99 deaths and 196 injuries of children between 1 February and 30 April. Improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war, crossfire and suicide attacks were the main causes. A total of 25 incidents involving actions against educational premises and staff, including the burning of schools, targeted killings and abductions, were reported; 9 were verified. Armed opposition groups were

reported to have recruited 29 boys to carry out conflict-related activities such as assembling and planting explosives and taking part in combat operations. Afghan security forces were reported to have recruited three boys for police operations. The country task force compiled a response to the progress report of the Government on implementing the action plan for the prevention of underage recruitment.

27. The targeted killing of civilians deemed to be supporting the authorities resulted in 158 civilian deaths between 1 February and 30 April — an increase of 88 per cent compared with 2012. Incidents included the beheading by anti-Government elements of three civilians from Ghorak district, Kandahar Province, on 18 March, allegedly for working with the Government. On 21 March, a remote-controlled improvised explosive device killed a district governor and two tribal elders in Takhar Province; the Taliban claimed responsibility. On 5 April, the Taliban also claimed responsibility for the attack on judicial institutions in Farah Province, which killed 33 civilians and injured 105 more, and threatened to target court workers further. The attack had an immediate, negative impact on the delivery of justice in a province where judges and prosecutors were already largely absent at the district level owing to security threats. On 19 April, anti-Government elements amputated a hand and a foot each of two private security guards employed by the international military in Herat. On 23 April, a district prosecutor in Faryab Province was ambushed in his vehicle and killed with five other civilians. On 20 May, the chair of the Baghlan Provincial Council — a major Jamiat figure — was killed by a suicide blast with another 13 civilians.

28. Operations by pro-Government forces resulted in the deaths of 76 civilians and 91 injuries between 1 February and 30 April. The majority resulted from aerial operations, which killed 34 civilians and injured 35. Ground engagements by pro-Government forces killed 12 civilians and injured 36. On 6 April, in Kunar Province, 13 civilians, including 11 children, died and 6 others were wounded in an airstrike. Further inquiry suggested that the casualties probably resulted from blast waves caused by the excessive use of air-delivered munitions. International forces had conducted aerial operations against anti-Government elements in the same district on 13 February, in which five children and four women were killed.

29. On 25 March, the Afghan authorities assumed control of the detention facility in Parwan (widely known as Bagram prison). The understanding is that detainees deemed dangerous are subject to some form of administrative detention and that they will not be released by Afghan authorities. On 3 April, the Minister of the Interior requested UNAMA to be international co-Chair of a subworking group on prisons to advise and provide guidance on implementing the Ministry's new 10-year vision. The initial focus is on a two-year plan for the Central Prison Directorate.

30. UNAMA also engaged with the Government and donors in advocating the implementation of Presidential Decree No. 129, by which key institutions, in particular the National Directorate of Security, the Attorney General's Office, the Supreme Court and the ministries of justice, the interior and public health are to prosecute alleged perpetrators of torture, release detainees being held arbitrarily and improve access to defence lawyers and medical treatment. A joint delegation of the Ministry of the Interior and the Supreme Court undertook an extensive review of detainee cases as part of this effort. Following visits to eight provinces, the delegation ordered the release of more than 300 prisoners whom it had found to have been detained illegally.

31. On 18 May, the Wolesi Jirga opened a debate on the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Promulgated as a presidential decree in 2009, it remains a landmark achievement in ensuring and expanding the protection of women. Despite disagreement between women's rights activists and the head of the Wolesi Jirga's Commission on Human Rights, Women and Civil Society, draft amendments were put forward in an attempt to secure parliamentary approval and strengthen some provisions. Upon introduction to the plenary, heated debate ensued, with conservative lawmakers attacking key provisions, including shelters for women victims of violence and a minimum marriage age. The bill was referred back to the house's technical commissions for further consideration. Full implementation of the law is a key government commitment under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul process, development coordination and the rule of law

32. On 10 April, President Karzai endorsed 24 tangible actions (17 for the Government and 7 for the international community) drawn from core elements of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. These "hard" deliverables aimed to track the implementation of commitments prior to the meeting of senior officials, to be held on 3 July, to review progress a year after the Framework was adopted. Most critical to the Government are international pledges to provide over $16 billion to Afghanistan until 2015, with 50 per cent of the assistance routed through the national budget and 80 per cent aligned with national priority programmes. Donors emphasize the need for the Government to commit to a credible, inclusive and robust electoral architecture; implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women; enforcement of anti-corruption measures; provincial budgeting processes; and a robust legal framework to encourage investment in the extractive industries. In preparing for the one-day meeting, it is expected that discussions will be held on the following themes: representational democracy and elections; aid effectiveness; governance, the rule of law and human rights; the integrity of public finance and commercial banking practices; government revenues, budget execution and subnational governance; and inclusive and sustained growth. The ministries of finance and for foreign affairs will co-chair the meeting together with my Special Representative for Afghanistan. UNAMA has acted as secretariat and facilitator of a task force between international stakeholders and the Ministry of Finance in preparing for the gathering.

33. Implementation of the 20 national priority programmes that have been endorsed has proceeded slowly. The Ministry of Finance and relevant line ministries have continued to map out projects within the programmes and to increase engagement with donors on project financing modalities. Two national priority programmes remain to be endorsed, on law and justice for all and on transparency and accountability. The Government reported some progress towards ratification of a national audit law and the streamlining of building permit procedures by the municipality of Kabul, as required by international partners before final backing of the transparency and accountability programme. Asset declarations for 7,000 high-ranking government officials have been submitted, and donors continue to press for a credible verification process. The United Nations has provided technical assistance and facilitated technical-level discussions between the Government and

donors to support the finalization of the programme on law and justice for all. On 23 May, a second draft was submitted to donors for comment.

34. The Ministry of Finance engaged with donors on the implementation of the aid management policy — the framework guiding national priority programme financing and a key international commitment in Tokyo — and on defining joint implementation priorities for 2013. Commitment to ensuring that each donor has a development framework agreement with the Government was a significant step given the complexities inherent in coordinating aid in Afghanistan, and is in line with global best practices.

35. On 6 March, the special tribunal for the Kabul Bank affair found 21 former banking officials guilty on a variety of charges related to the $980 million fraud that severely affected the country's financial system in 2010 and required an international bailout. The former Chair and the former Chief Executive Officer of Kabul Bank were each given five-year prison sentences, while the 19 other defendants were sentenced to jail for between two and five years. The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee expressed disappointment at the relatively light sentences. That the verdicts were not based on money-laundering charges presents significant challenges to recovering offshore funds. Assistance in forensic auditing is currently being provided and additional charges may follow. Implementation of the Tokyo Framework requires tangible progress on issues of accountability and transparency.

V. Development and humanitarian assistance

36. On 15 April, United Nations country team representatives from Afghanistan and Pakistan held a one-day meeting in Islamabad to reach a shared understanding of the post-2014 environment in the region. Resident coordinators from both countries chaired the meeting and my Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, attended. Participants agreed to strengthen collaboration in the following areas: subnational governance; remote and risk management; disaster risk reduction and management; contingency planning; and cross-border issues. In Afghanistan, work continued on a common country assessment to inform the development of the post-2015 United Nations development assistance framework. The development of a macro-country framework will be followed by an assessment of agreed-upon key sectors and development challenges: inclusive economic growth; accountable governance; humanitarian action; service delivery; and environmental management.

37. On 24 April, an earthquake in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar claimed 15 lives. In addition, 84 people were wounded and 3,000 homes were destroyed. As at 14 May, spring floods across 19 provinces had killed 36 people and affected some 40,000. Flooding was at lower levels than recent years, given a mild winter with reduced snowfall. Between 13 and 17 April, Ms. Wahlström visited Afghanistan and met government officials and local stakeholders. She observed an improvement in disaster response but noted that overall national capacity remained weak and that coordination and integration across line ministries was required. The goal for the 2013 Common Humanitarian Action Plan is $471 million, but as at 31 May only $235 million (50 per cent of the goal) had been contributed.

38. During the first four months of 2013, 10,934 refugees returned voluntarily to Afghanistan, a decrease of 6 per cent compared with the same period in 2012. On 31 March, the United Nations and the Government of Afghanistan agreed to form a committee, chaired by Second Vice-President Mohammad Karim Khalili, to bring together key ministries and the United Nations country team to seek joint solutions and integrated approaches for refugees and internally displaced persons, also in the context of my framework on ending displacement in post-conflict situations.

39. To date in 2013 there have been increasing levels of internal displacement as a consequence of hostilities, often in isolated areas of the country, in particular in districts in the northern and southern regions, where humanitarian access is hampered by remoteness and insecurity. After police checkpoints in three districts of Faryab Province were attacked on 22 April, two weeks of hostilities ensued, temporarily displacing an estimated 2,000 families. On 20 May, attacks on government checkpoints and subsequent fighting by armed opposition groups led to the displacement of an estimated 4,000 families in Helmand Province. Humanitarian actors have found it increasingly difficult to gain access to remote areas owing to insecurity and have received reports of civilians facing problems moving to areas of safety.

40. By the end of April, two cases of polio had been reported in the eastern region, one in Nangarhar Province and the other in Kunar Province. The southern region, one of the most volatile in terms of polio virus circulation, has reported no cases since November. National immunization campaigns held from 10 to 12 March and from 21 to 23 April targeted the country's estimated 8.2 million children under 5 years of age. Additional campaigns continued in 11 low-performing districts in the south; this aggressive approach should continue in the second half of 2013. Better monitoring and causal analysis of inaccessibility, as well as closer liaison with communities, have improved access. On 13 May, the Taliban released a statement in which it expressed support for immunization programmes that respect Islamic values and local cultural conditions.

41. A total of 15 km^2 of mine-contaminated land was cleared in the reporting period, benefiting 20 communities and 30,000 individuals. Owing to insufficient funding, however, 3,000 demining staff have become unemployed since the beginning of 2013. Afghanistan now runs the risk of missing the first annual goals under its approved 10-year extension request for implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Accidents involving mines and explosive remnants of war have killed or injured an average of 47 people per month since January, up from an average of 30 per month in 2012. Accidents in formerly off-limit areas in and around bases and facilities from which international military forces have recently withdrawn and to which local populations are now gaining access are included in the figures.

42. On 7 and 8 May, the ministers of labour, the economy and social affairs co-chaired a conference on creating sustainable jobs in Kabul. Supported by the United Nations and the World Bank, the event brought together more than 300 participants from key ministries, workers' and employers' organizations, academia and the donor community. Participants identified priorities — improving competitiveness and ensuring job-rich growth, developing demand-driven skills and

managing and stimulating labour migration — and next steps, including refining the Afghan national employment policy and developing a national employment strategy.

43. From 17 to 19 May, the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Irina Bokova, visited Afghanistan, where she met with President Karzai and senior government officials to discuss the role of education and culture as pillars of nation-building. With parliamentarians and women's groups, Ms. Bokova expressed concern over possible setbacks for women after 2014 and emphasized the need to provide assurances that they are full members of society. In a meeting with the Minister of Education, Ms. Bokova stressed the importance of girls' and women's education as a fundamental right and as a key to reducing poverty, improving health, raising incomes and promoting political participation.

VI. Counter-narcotics

44. The second and final phase of the 2013 Opium Risk Assessment, produced by the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations, focused on the north and north-east and confirmed a likely increase in opium poppy cultivation for the third consecutive year. It indicates that the poppy-free status of Balkh, Takhar and Faryab Provinces is at risk unless timely measures are implemented. If current trends continue, the total number of opium poppy-free provinces in 2013 would drop to 14, down from 17 in 2012 and 20 in 2010. Badakhshan Province, the largest site of cultivation in the north-east, is likely to see an increase in cultivation. The assessment reiterated that there was a strong association between insecurity, lack of agricultural assistance and opium poppy cultivation. Villages with poor security and that did not receive agricultural assistance in 2012 were significantly more likely to grow opium poppy in 2013 than communities with good security and that did receive support or had been reached by relevant awareness-raising campaigns.

45. In his 10-year vision, the Minister of the Interior recognized counter-narcotics as a priority and underscored the need for autonomous counter-narcotics capacity within the Ministry. Outstanding questions regarding the command and control arrangements of the counter-narcotics police in the provinces remain to be determined. As at 27 May, governor-led eradication activities had been concluded in Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Nangarhar, Laghman, Uruzgan, Herat, Kunar, Daikundi, Zabul, Kapisa, Balkh, Badghis and Farah Provinces and were being carried out in Kunar, Badakhshan, Faryab and Ghor Provinces. To date, 5,282 ha of opium poppy crops have been eradicated. In these efforts, 131 lives have been lost, including those of 27 police officers, 4 Afghan Local Police officers, 9 Afghan army personnel, 1 driver and 90 others. Another 87 people were injured. By the same period in 2012, a total of 10,413 ha of poppy crops had been eradicated under governors' initiatives, 100 lives had been lost and 122 people had been injured.

46. On 23 and 24 April, a seminar organized by the United Nations on regional challenges in addressing the problem of illicit drugs in Central Asia in the context of the Afghan transition was held in Dushanbe. Participants included representatives of the five Central Asian countries, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, as well as regional and subregional organizations. Participants in the seminar assessed regional security dynamics, trends in illicit drug production and trafficking, the impact of drug-related organized crime on the State and the role of

international and regional organizations. On 9 and 10 April, the sixth meeting of financial intelligence units in the region was held in Almaty under the Criminal Assets Southern Hub initiative in cooperation with the Central Asian Regional and Information Coordination Centre and under the United Nations-led Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries. Seven countries and donors discussed money-laundering, the financing of terrorism and information exchange on suspicious financial transactions. The United Nations was requested to develop a road map to promote more efficient cross-border work on money-laundering, to be finalized by the end of 2013 following consultations with Governments participating in the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries. On 7 and 8 May, the Regional Intelligence Working Group on Precursor Chemicals met in Dushanbe to share information on the latest seizures of controlled substances.

VII. Mission support

47. The Mission is currently working on the budget proposal for 2014/15. It is hoped that, despite the 18.7 per cent reduction in funding for UNAMA in 2013, it will be possible to avoid further large-scale disruption and organizational change in 2014, during the delicate transition period. Cost savings and increased efficiencies will be implemented and the Mission's operations are undergoing reassessment and prioritization, including through a staffing review. Lower vacancy rates, staff cost increases and pressure on operating costs mean that even a zero-growth budget would result in a reduction in real value. The decommissioning of the UNAMA regional jet, which flies regularly between Kabul and Dubai, will save $6.2 million annually. UNAMA is putting in place standby arrangements with regional carriers for in extremis support.

48. Having closed nine field offices, UNAMA has been developing more flexible and cost-effective models for mandate implementation, to expand and contract activities in coordination with the United Nations country team, as programme requirements and opportunities evolve. Developing and maintaining networks and relationships nationwide, UNAMA has focused on carrying out more joint missions to areas without a permanent UNAMA field presence. Representatives of UNAMA and the country team travelled together on overnight visits to Paktika, Ghazni, Helmand, Zabul, Nimroz, Ghor and Badghis.

49. Amid reorganization and in support of the wider United Nations family, 15 armoured vehicles were transferred from UNAMA to Bamako on 29 April for use by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. An additional 15 vehicles were transferred, on 21 May, to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

50. The Kuwait Joint Support Office continued to make progress, as planned, in integrating the support provided to UNAMA and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq and consolidating existing business practices. Key deliverables include drafting service-level agreements and related key performance indicators for human resources and financial transaction processes and providing support for the implementation of United Nations global initiatives, including the International Public Sector Accounting Standards, Umoja and Inspira.

VIII. Observations

51. One year after the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, it is important to reflect on progress made towards a stable and sustainable political and economic transition. I expect that, at a meeting to be held in Kabul in July, senior officials will frankly assess the status of mutual commitments between the Government and the international community. The level of support that the international community has pledged to Afghanistan for the coming decade is extraordinary. That support needs to be delivered predictably and in ways that strengthen national ownership. The Government, in turn, is responsible for making progress in meeting the needs and aspirations of the Afghan people. Accountability and demonstrable results are essential to a robust partnership and sustained international support.

52. A legitimate succession in leadership is key to the political transition. Reaching an agreement on the rules of the game will do much to enhance the credibility of the electoral process and the acceptability of its outcome. Delays in the passage of electoral laws have added uncertainty among Afghan stakeholders over the intention of holding timely elections using a sound process that would provide a level playing field for all candidates. The substance of the legislation is that Afghans should be the ones to decide, but agreement is urgently needed on a consultative mechanism for appointing members to elections bodies — thus enabling a broadly accepted Chair to be named to the Independent Election Commission — and an impartial complaints mechanism. Goodwill and compromise will be required on all sides. Legislative consensus will aid in keeping the political momentum and underpin technical preparations.

53. I am encouraged by the fact that the Independent Election Commission has agreed on timelines, operational frameworks and proposed polling sites a year ahead of election day — an unprecedented achievement in Afghanistan. I urge Afghan security institutions to ensure similar momentum for securing the electoral process and ensuring broad and inclusive participation. An agreement on appropriate funding modalities must also be reached urgently. UNAMA has been actively facilitating discussions among members of the international community and between donors and Afghan authorities to reach agreements that recognize the requirements not only of sovereignty and sustainability but also of donor accountability. It has also worked, pursuant to its mandate, to promote inclusive dialogue between political stakeholders. The e-taskera project, while being of great national import, is a mid- to long-term endeavour that will have limited impact during the 2014/15 electoral cycle. Securing the necessary funding can help ensure the greatest utility possible in the time remaining, but the emphasis must be on sustainability, not speed.

54. Pluralism and vigorous public debate are equally necessary to ensure a level electoral contest. I am heartened by the vibrant media and civil society participation to date. Individuals and political parties should present clear platforms and agendas as soon as possible, to enable constituents to make clear choices about their country's future.

55. The other major line of political effort for stability and development is the peace process. UNAMA has increased its outreach and capacity-building efforts, to help facilitate an increasingly unified, coherent Afghan vision of the future and promote national dialogue. To that end, the Mission's work on regional cooperation

and its national reach, including through a unique network of field offices, are essential. Continued delay in establishing an office in Doha for representatives of the Taliban authorized to talk with the High Peace Council may feed doubts about this more formal line of effort. I reiterate the need for a coherent Afghan-led process. UNAMA stands ready to provide assistance, including by facilitating a track II initiative under the United Nations umbrella.

56. The recent increase in tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan are of concern. While I am encouraged by the positive exchanges that have taken place between the leaders of the two countries following the elections in Pakistan, I appeal to both Governments to focus on building trust to prevent confrontation and an inflamed public sentiment. Regional cooperation is critical to stability and economic development. The declaration adopted in Almaty has added momentum to the Istanbul Process. I encourage countries of the "heart of Asia" region, supporting nations and international and regional organizations to continue making progress with regard to developing a framework for political dialogue, concrete initiatives and confidence-building that is truly owned by regional actors, and to work towards the full potential and financial sustainability of such a framework.

57. Business confidence is weakened by uncertainty. A serious focus on sustainable revenue mobilization and regulatory frameworks that encourages private sector growth is required. Corruption and the illicit economy — including that resulting from a rise in opium poppy cultivation for the third year running — are chronic and damaging to inclusive growth and, ultimately, donor interest. The handing down of relatively light sentences to 21 people involved in the collapse of the Kabul Bank must not signal the end of accountability in this scandal. Robust and ongoing action, in particular on asset recovery and sound financial regulation, are essential. Demonstrations of commitment to sound institutional and financial fundamentals will be critical to ensuring sustained international assistance.

58. Another key commitment made by the Government in Tokyo is related to sustaining and strengthening the gains made by women in Afghanistan in the past decade. Women's empowerment and standing in public life is not only a matter of human rights but also central to unlocking the full economic and social capital of Afghanistan. The heated debate that has emerged in Afghanistan has demonstrated the fragile nature of such progress. Every effort must be made to safeguard the achievements of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, in line with the international commitments of Afghanistan.

59. The armed conflict has exacted a heavy toll on civilians, and I am gravely concerned by the 25 per cent increase in civilian casualties that was recorded in the present quarter, after a decrease in 2012 (as noted in A/67/778-S/2013/133, of 5 March 2013). Using terror as a primary tactic, anti-Government elements continue to target civilian Afghan officials and public locations with the indiscriminate use of suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices. The Taliban's statement that judges and prosecutors are acceptable targets is in violation of the international legal distinctions between civilians and combatants. Recent attacks on humanitarian organizations are also of great concern. A more brutal phase of the conflict, focused on civilians, will only entrench and deepen animosities and cycles of violence. I call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law.

60. As the security transition proceeds, so the nature of the conflict continues to evolve. Moreover, anti-Government groups, local power brokers and criminal

networks vie for power and control of resources, including the narcotics industry, in a series of shifting alliances and local contests. Simple assessments of the violence based on numbers alone can be misleading. The real test of security is whether people feel confident in their daily lives and future prospects. As increasingly competent and capable Afghan forces assume the lead responsibility for security across the country, it will be critical for them to demonstrate their capacity to protect the population in order to build confidence. Security problems and internal and external challenges remain. Given that Afghan security institutions are still developing and lack some critical enablers, there will necessarily be risks, delays and setbacks. Long-term international support remains critical not only for political and economic certainty, but also to build public confidence in the Afghan security forces and to avoid the risk of communities seeking alternative sources of security.

61. Strengthening the accountability and oversight of security and judicial institutions is an essential part of sovereignty. The recent release of detainees found to be imprisoned illegally is encouraging. Robust, ongoing efforts must continue to prevent, and ensure accountability for, the torture and ill treatment of detainees.

62. I commend the efforts made by all parties to secure and implement recent immunization campaigns. Nevertheless, I note that, amid a complex humanitarian situation, humanitarian agencies expect hostilities in remote areas to increase and that this will subsequently lead to displacement and affect the ability of humanitarian actors to access populations. I note the urgency of putting measures in place to ensure that the displaced have the opportunity to seek safety and access to humanitarian assistance. For the over half a million people who have been displaced by conflict and who are likely to remain dependent on aid, as well as for returning refugees and migrants, reliance on humanitarian efforts alone is not a sustainable solution. Afghan institutional capacity for disaster preparedness and response must also receive increasing attention from Afghan authorities and donors, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

63. Discussion is under way within the United Nations and with key Afghan and international stakeholders on how to prepare for the challenges and opportunities of the transition and beyond. On the path to normalization, the United Nations is committed to assist Afghanistan in strengthening its sovereignty, its political framework, its institutional capacity for service delivery and its economic self-sufficiency. Agencies too will increasingly focus their policy and capacity-building expertise on assisting national and local institutions and organizations to build and sustain effective systems of delivery. I reiterate that the Mission's core tasks are to provide good offices and political outreach in support of Afghan-led political, reconciliation and regional processes and to promote respect for human rights and development coherence. While a different form of engagement, one that strengthens sovereignty and national ownership, will be required after 2014, I believe these key priorities will remain valid throughout the transition and beyond. A special political mission has a vital role in supporting the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan people and in facilitating constructive engagement with the international community in ensuring that commitments are met and have demonstrable impact.

64. The foundations of the institutions of Afghanistan are largely in place but remain subject to complex and deep-seated security, humanitarian and capacity challenges. The uncertainty of the transition period and the scale of reliance on external resources create their own dynamics. In a period of great flux, it is crucial

that the goal of a strong, increasingly self-sufficient and sovereign country with institutions able to secure and serve the population remains at the forefront of all efforts.

65. I would like to express my gratitude to all national and international staff members of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and to my Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, for their continued dedication, often under challenging conditions, to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.